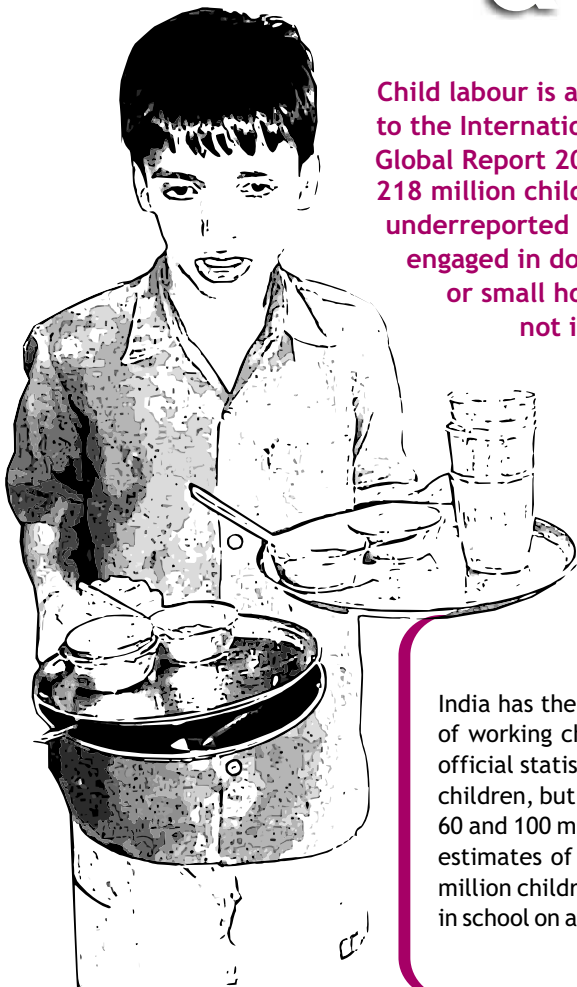


Child Labour & Tourism



Child labour is a worldwide problem. According to the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Global Report 2006, it affects the lives of 218 million children. This number is probably underreported because many children engaged in domestic or agricultural work or small home based enterprises are not included in the official figures.

Incredible India

India has the distinction of the largest number of working children in the world today. Indian official statistics speak about almost 13 million children, but unofficial estimates vary between 60 and 100 million children. This coincides with estimates of NGO's that around 40% of all 250 million children between 6 and 14 years are not in school on a given day.

In India as in the world over, tourism is one more realm that pulls in a significant number of children as child labour. It is common to see children working in abysmal conditions in small restaurants and shacks, selling curios and trinkets, as beach boys and girls, rag pickers, tourist guides or begging rich tourists for money. In hotels, children work as bell-boys, waiters and waitresses, maids, house keeping workers while in catering many serve dishes, work as kitchen helpers or dish-washers. Children also work as masseurs and prostitutes. In the travel business they work as porters and coolies, cleaners and assistants and for carrying loads on treks.



An estimated 13-19 million children and young people below 18 years of age (10-15 per cent of all employees in tourism!) are employed in the industry worldwide. However, these figures take no account of the number of children working in the informal sector in ancillary activities. Child labour in tourism is common in both developing and in developed countries. Many boys and girls below 12 years of age are engaged in small business activities related to hotels and restaurants, the entertainment sector or the souvenir trade, often as porters or street or beach vendors. They are frequently subjected to harsh working and employment conditions.

Source: International Labour Organization

Work damages a child's physical, mental, social, and psychological development. So why do children work?

Children find themselves compelled to work because of situations which are beyond their control. The International Labour Organization describes this succinctly when it says "Child labour is

a result of, and a contributing factor to, entrenched poverty”. Some causes that force children into work are

- The socio-economic condition of families - for poor families children are a productive resource
- Labour economics: child labour is cheap labour. Children are employed instead of adults to lower the costs of production
- Sudden poverty caused by natural disasters, droughts, the impoverishment of agrarian economies and forced migration, the push to urban areas for survival, economic crises, displacement, or armed conflict also lead to situations of increase in child labour.

Why is working in the tourism sector so risky for the child?

- Children involved in tourism related work run the risk of being sexually exploited due to constant exposure and involvement with strangers who intend to exploit children. For instance, children employed in roadside eateries and highway dhabas are highly vulnerable to sexual abuse and drug abuse and to contracting HIV/AIDS as they come in contact with both locals as well as tourists.
- Because of their physical and economic vulnerability, many children end up in a life of servitude, suffering sexual as well as physical exploitation.
- Long working hours, unstable employment, low pay, and extremely poor working and living conditions lead to poor health - physical and psychological.

So who is responsible ?

Child labour is a complex social issue that demands sensitive and serious interventions not only from the policy-makers, but also from civil society and progressive movements. The Government of India recently announced a ban (made effective 10th October 2006), on the employment of children as domestic servants and workers in roadside eateries, teashops, restaurants, hotels etc. The reason according to the Ministry of Labour and Employment of the Government of India, is that many of these children are subjected to physical violence, psychological trauma and even sexual abuse. While the decision to ban child labour, in principle,

is welcome, the issues are far more complex than just saying "no" to child labour. What happens to the millions of children for whom domestic work and work in restaurants is now prohibited? Where do they go? Who will ensure that they are safe and are not pushed into less visible even more abusive conditions? In a knee jerk reaction, the Ministry of Labour recently indicated that they are in consultation with other departments, to set up 'shelter homes' to rehabilitate the children who will be "freed" from work. Is putting children into rehabilitation homes the solution?

Most rescue operations are failures in the sense that the solution is not systemic and in most cases the children show up as child labour again. The tourism industry which is otherwise so image conscious has not proactively worked to rid tourism of child abuse and child labour. Each of us as citizens and as tourists also turn a blind eye to the far too common sight of a young child working in very abusive conditions.

Any piece-meal approach to child labour is bound to be ineffective (as many previous failed schemes and plans have taught us). Unless the underlying causes of child labour are addressed, and the rights of children are secured, we will continue deprive millions of children - our tomorrow and their today.

Are you interested in knowing more about the impacts of tourism particularly on the child ?

Write to us at info@equitabletourism.org

Who we are

Established in 1985, EQUATIONS is an advocacy and campaigning organization working with the vision of tourism that is non-exploitative, that benefits local communities , is sustainable and ecologically sensitive

EQUATIONS programme on the Child and Tourism: Alarmed at the growing links between tourism and the abuse of children - in the forms of child labour, commercial sexual exploitation of children and trafficking, we actively work with local communities, concerned groups, government agencies, the tourism industry and other players to devise strategies to ensure that tourism is not based on the exploitation of children.



Equations

Equitable Tourism Options

#415,2C-Cross, 4th Main,OMBR layout, Banaswadi, Bangalore-560043

Ph:+91-80-25457607/25457659 Fax:+91-80-25457665 info@equitabletourism.org

Url:www.equitabletourism.org